

STRESS AND POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

COPING WITH STRESS

Military families experience a tremendous amount of pride for contributing to the nation's defense. They also enjoy many rich, new experiences. However, pressures and frustrations can also result because of the separation caused by deployment. Included among them are:

- Family financial problems
- Separation from family and friends
- Single parenting problems
- Constant adjustment to varying duty schedules
- Frequent relocation
- Career changes in retirement

Children may try to take advantage of possible new freedoms. A stable home life is important for their psychological adjustment. Consistent rules, a consistent household schedule, and a special time set aside for families are important to minimizing the stress of a parent's absence.

Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) may include:

- **Depression** – chronic numb or flat feeling.
- **Isolation** – feeling withdrawn from family and friends.
- **Alienation** – absence of meaningful contact with others.
- **Avoidance of feelings** – inability to feel or express feelings.
- **Rage** – bouts of unexplained anger; may be internal or acted out.
- **Anxiety** – unexplained nervousness, tension, or hyper alert feelings.
- **Sleep disturbances** – insomnia or nightmares.
- **Intrusive thoughts** – recollections of traumatic experiences that appear for no apparent reason.
- **Startle responses** – unusual, involuntary reactions to loud noises, such as an automobile backfire.

PTSD probably won't go away on its own. It needs to be treated. If you or your spouse experience four or more of these symptoms regularly, seek professional help through one of the agencies listed on page 10.

Combat Stress & PTSD

- The Short Course -

*Combat Stress goes away and doesn't interfere with your life;
PTSD lingers or returns and does interfere with your life.*

What Is It?

Combat Stress

It's An Ordinary Response To Extraordinary Events

PTSD

It's An Invisible Wound To Heart and Mind Verses
A Visible Wound to Chest or Head

How Do I Recognize It?

- **PSYCHOLOGICAL Symptoms Of The Wound**
 - Reliving the event in your head, nightmares, can't relax (hyper-vigilant), easily startled, etc.
- **PHYSICAL Symptoms Of The Wound**
 - Sleeplessness, restlessness, agitation, outbursts / rage, fight-flight, destructive habits (alcohol, drugs, overeating, recklessness, etc.)
- **EMOTIONAL Symptoms Of The Wound**
 - Withdrawal from the very people you love the most, "shut-down" as opposed to "open-up", melancholy, sadness, "numbing out", can't enjoy the things you used to, etc.

What Do I Do About It?

1. Own That You've Been Hit And Do Something About It!

It's a bullet under your vest. You and others may not have seen it at first, but it's a wound none-the-less. Wounds need treatment or they get infected and cause greater problems. The sooner you treat the wound; the sooner you get better. Ignoring a wound usually isn't an effective method for survival.

2. Find Out All You Can About How To Take Care Of Yourself

- A. See a doctor, a counselor, or a chaplain that knows how to treat this type of invisible wound.
- B. Take charge of your own care plan and get on-line and learn as much as you can at www.ncptsd.va.gov

3. Take The Best Prescription You Can Get

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS by talking (even though you may not *feel* like taking the medicine) with a) those who've "been there done that" . . . friends and a PTSD Support Group, and b) your spouse and loved ones. Solid, supportive relationships are the best antidote you've got, so invest in the cure!

STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS

- **GET UP EARLIER** to allow yourself more time before starting the day's work.
- **PRIORITIZE** what is truly critical and pace yourself accordingly.
- **PAUSE** before you begin your work day to notice what kind of day it is.
- **BE REALISTIC** and kind to yourself when making your "to do" list.
- **TAKE LUNCH OR BREAKS** away from your work area, avoid eating quickly, and don't talk about work.
- Spend your **LEISURE TIME** with enthusiastic, upbeat friends. Since many of your friends will be in the same position as you, you should be enthusiastic and upbeat with them.
- **REST** quietly for five minutes during the day or take a brief walk.
- **SAY "NO"** when you need to.
- **ASK** for help when you need it, whether it's time away from the children, a counseling session, or a vacation.
- **FOCUS** on immediate or short-term goals that are attainable.
- **RECEIVE APPRECIATION** that is due. Accept praise and thank yous.
- **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF** when you are down and out—play your favorite song, see a movie, or give up on the housework for the evening.
- **ANALYZE YOUR MOODS**, energy, and time. Are you down at certain times of the day, week, or month? Plan and prepare.
- Use **RELAXATION**, meditation, music, religion, nature, or your favorite activity to reenergize yourself.
- **PAY ATTENTION** to your diet, sleep, exercise, and general health.
- **VOLUNTEER!** Helping others is good medicine for the soul and spirit to fill your empty days. Call the Red Cross or ACS for volunteer opportunities.

- **SET A GOAL.** Start the project you have been putting off. Begin a self-improvement program. Go back to school. Do something for yourself.
- **INITIATE,** don't wait for the phone to ring. Plan an outing or a special dinner, and then call several friends to join you.
- **TRAVEL.** New scenery and change of pace, if only for a day or two, does wonders for the spirit. Plan on taking friends and making a day of it.
- **GO TO WORK.** A full or part time job can provide extra income as well as opportunities for interaction.
- **JOIN** a support group. Whether it is through the Family Support Group, your church/chapel/synagogue, or work, the support of friends makes the going easier.
- Take up a new **HOBBY** or return to the one you gave up.
- **DON'T FEEL GUILTY** about going out with friends and leaving your children with a sitter. That is the cheapest form of sanity check available.
- **KEEP A JOURNAL** of your thoughts and activities while your spouse is away to help catch up when the unit returns. Be sure to include pictures.



The Five Phases of Reunion

1. PRE-ENTRY takes place during the few days before your reunion. You're working long hours to ensure equipment has been turned in and that your work is caught up before going home. Things to expect in this phase include:

Fantasies Excitement Work Planning Thoughts

2. REUNION takes place during your immediate meeting and a few days after your arrival. This is a time of courtship, relearning, intimacy, and a happy time or honeymoon. This is not the time to address problems. It is a time for understanding. Things to expect in this phase include:

Physical changes	Courting again	Social events
Immediate excitement	Pride in each other	Intimacy and sex
Fatigue and a readiness to relax	Spending time with children	Needing time and space

3. DISRUPTION. As problems surface, expectations of a "normal" family life go down. Things to expect in this phase include:

Independence challenges	Children issues (changes/growth)	Routine changes
Financial questions	General differences	Thought changes
Trust issues	Control issues	Hard times stories
Unresolved problems/issues	Jealousy issues	Decision making challenges

4. COMMUNICATION is a time of renegotiating new routines, reconnecting, and redefining family roles. New rules will be established. Things to expect in this phase include:

Renegotiation Trust Reconnection Acceptance New rules

5. NORMAL – This phase is attained once you're back to the normal family routine of sharing, growing, experiencing the ups and downs, happiness, and sadness of a family. Things to expect in this phase include:

Established routines

Acceptance of change

Personal growth

GETTING REACQUAINTED

1. Identify and define the problem or conflict. What is really the problem? What exactly is wrong? Identify the problem without assigning blame or attacking persons. Be aware of the feelings and needs of all those involved.

2. Brainstorm for possible solutions. Express and record all ideas as fast as you think of them. No judgment or discussion is allowed during brainstorming—BE CREATIVE!

3. Evaluate the alternatives. Look at the consequences of each possible solution. Work together to find a solution acceptable to all. "Give and take" is necessary for a win-win solution.

4. Choose the best solution. Mutual agreement and commitment are necessary.

5. Implement the solution. Decide when and how to evaluate needed changes, delegation of tasks, and time frames for completion.

6. Assess the results with a follow-up evaluation. Is the situation better or worse? If it's better, do you want to continue? If it's worse, look at another possible solution discussed during your brainstorming session and implement it. Be persistent until the problem is resolved.

